



**ASIST**

**Advisory Support, Information Services and Training**

**TRENDS IN EMPLOYMENT-INTENSIVE PROGRAMMES**

**Background Note no. 1**

**for the**

**ASIST**

**Review and Planning Workshop**

**23 - 26 November 1999**



**Employment-Intensive Investment Branch  
Recovery and Reconstruction Department**



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## 1 Introduction

This background paper gives some indications on the recent trends in respect of Employment-Intensive Programmes (EIP) in different sectors. The paper does not aim to give a comprehensive and a state-of-the-art review of Employment-Intensive Programmes of today. It examines the trends and developments of the three areas of coverage of ASIST, i.e. access and rural employment, rural roads and infrastructure, and urban works activities. Some crosscutting issues related to Employment-Intensive Programme development are discussed in the concluding section.

## 2 Strategies for employment and poverty eradication

The number of people living below the poverty line is increasing in many developing countries. Debt servicing has become a major burden and the current globalisation of the economy seems to have more negative than positive effects for the least developed countries. This has led donors and lending agencies to seriously refocus their programmes of assistance on the fight against poverty. The donor agencies have targeted the eradication of poverty by year 2015, a very ambitious and bold objective.

Employment-intensive programmes in Africa and beyond form part of development efforts by governments, non-governmental organisations and lending and donor agencies. In most cases they are being implemented as part of a development effort to eradicate poverty. In developing and industrialised countries alike, public works investment programmes continue to be used by policy makers as an instrument in getting people employed as a short-term solution.

The question is: is this enough?

The ILO's view is that these programmes can and should make a much more substantial contribution to employment creation and poverty reduction. Infrastructure investment programmes implemented without the necessary local capacities, either available or developed to the needs of the programmes, may in the worst case even have a negative influence on poverty; ending up with expensive and high quality infrastructure without maintenance capacity, but with a heavy loan to service by the country. An optimal use of local resources, including labour, skills, materials and finance, etc., must be established to make sure that the economy and the target populations benefit the most. This, however, in most cases implies that major investments are necessary to build capacities at local and national levels, both with the public and private sector.

Of course, in order to have any substantial impact on social and economic development, the infrastructure investments must not be a goal in itself, but rather a facilitator in providing the priority services for people most in need of it. The current emphasis on social (health, education, etc.) as much as on economic (roads, markets, etc.) infrastructure reflects this very well.

Most development agencies and donors are now pursuing these strategies. We have seen important shifts in policies and strategies of one of the major players in the development field, namely the World Bank, which has placed poverty reduction at the top of the agenda. Comprehensive development frameworks are being developed with partner countries and agencies. The respect for local initiatives and priorities is placed at the forefront of any development programme. It is the World Bank's intention that funds will be made available for general development purposes, and that sectoral investments will only be pursued in as much as they fit into the comprehensive development framework. If

implemented, this will imply that World Bank staff will, to a far lesser extent, be assessed on their capacity to deliver loans (the turnover), but rather on their ability to develop and follow-up on the agreed development objectives and country strategies. These developments augur well for an increased use of employment-intensive strategies, because they will make it more acceptable to undertake the necessary capacity building and development work in order to arrive at increased poverty reduction.

There is also an ongoing debate about debt relief for developing countries. Among the proposals made is one concerning the cancelling of debt against investments in the development of social services. The latter will require a lot of infrastructure, out of which much may, and *should* be done through employment-intensive work programmes.

A negative trend has been that an increasing part of the development aid is to feed into employment and businesses in the donor country. This tied aid does of course adversely affect the use of local resources and the development of local capacities at large, and in particular the use of employment-intensive work methods. A further dialogue with the donor countries, and in particular their taxpayers will be needed to create awareness of this problem and, hopefully, establish an agreement on new comprehensive policies for donor support.

### **3 Employment-Intensive Programmes: current trends and implications**

#### **3.1 Community Participation**

Increasing emphasis is once again being given to “community participation” in development strategies. This recognises the fact that development programmes are unlikely to succeed if the intended beneficiaries are not involved in the entire process. This entails that people must be involved not only in the implementation of projects (for instance as project workers), but throughout the process from identification to operation, maintenance and evaluation.

This concept of course is not new, as many of the integrated development programmes of the 1970s had the same intentions of involving “the people”. However, whereas some of these programmes showed good results, others were facing difficulties in reaching their objectives and ensuring that investments were in line with the priorities of the communities. The programmes were often supported by a single donor and confined to a province or region without the appropriate anchorage in national policies. In addition, programmes based on different principles were often implemented alongside each other even within the same region. For example, adjacent externally supported programmes often competed with local “community-based” programmes and diverted attention of key officials away from the latter to the more easily controlled and conventional way of delivering projects. Subsequently, the lack of policy support, and adequate planning and implementation capacities strangled many of these integrated development programmes.

Another problem was the way that external financial support was provided; in many cases funds were pre-allocated and made available only on a sectoral basis. Funds for roads could not be used for footbridges or as credits for local means of transport. This resulted in resources mainly going to priority development areas as seen by the developers, the “outsiders”. It is evident that this does not promote community or stakeholder participation strategies, and many a programme has left communities disillusioned about their possible influence on investment priorities and programme development.



### **3.2 Local Authorities and Decentralisation**

The present shift in policies has placed greater responsibility for rural development on local authorities, local organisations and local people themselves. Much of the development effort at local level is intended to go through newly established or strengthened local authorities or agencies, including communities. The decentralisation of responsibility - and authority - is gaining speed in many countries, thereby enabling much greater community participation and stakeholder involvement.

But there are big risks inherent to this approach. With dwindling resources for development and increasing demands from the (increasingly urbanised) population, many a government has resorted to this option to avoid responsibility. However, decentralising responsibility for social and economic infrastructure, without the accompanying resources and capacity building, means that inappropriate planning, inadequate resources and over-committed local authorities and communities are the order of the day in many countries.

### **3.3 Accessibility**

The ILO in its employment-intensive programmes now mainly uses the term rural accessibility in terms of providing access to basic and socio-economic services and facilities. The concept considers both mobility and the location of services and this term is therefore better representing the work than the term "rural transport".

Local accessibility problems can only be identified at local level with a full involvement of the communities, and the identification should include basic, social and economic sectors like health, education, grinding mills, energy (wood lots), water, markets, etc. Accessibility improvements may therefore comprise infrastructure investments, facilitating the use of motorised and non-motorised means of transport and improving location of services.

To address the identification of poor access, the ILO has developed the Integrated Rural Accessibility Planning (IRAP) tool. This planning procedure involves local communities and authorities in a partnership to carry out local level planning. The objective is to involve communities in the identification of access problems on a cross-sectoral basis, to set priorities both within and between sectors and to develop partnerships in the implementation. The new decentralisation policies are crucial for this, because they should facilitate the availability and management of financial resources. Of course, a truly participatory process and planning exercise requires that any external resources made available should take account of the priority setting at local level. This implies in turn that financial regulations should be modified to allow for much greater flexibility in the utilisation of loans and grants.

ASIST is working on the further development and introduction of IRAP. Its integration into the local level planning strategies will be an important means to help local authorities fairly distribute the available development funding and to implement appropriate and affordable solutions to the accessibility problems at local level. The above means a shift from the focus on infrastructure development towards a more general objective providing priority services. This does not necessarily mean that the infrastructure work itself will, or should, be given less importance, but rather that the infrastructure's importance in improving access will be the focus of attention. The main message is that the transport service should be an integral part of transport infrastructure and complementary to it.

### **3.4 Accessibility and Spot Improvements**

The focus on accessibility will in turn have an impact on the choice of works to be undertaken. The availability of services is a crucial prerequisite for getting out of poverty. Accessibility planning is one way of determining the service level.

In this context spot improvement is an important concept. The spot that is preventing access must be dealt with. It may be the replacement or construction of a bridge or water crossing for vehicles or alternatively, for people. If the priority is high, the investment may be more important in the sense that most of a road, a health centre or a school building will be rehabilitated to provide the level of service as identified by the local community. It could still be termed spot improvement. The World Bank strategy paper on "Design and Appraisal of Rural Transport Infrastructure" which is now being developed for World Bank-supported programmes, is based on these principles.

### **3.5 Employment and Sustainable Livelihoods**

In short, one could say that the concept of sustainable livelihoods means that any activity should be looked at in the context of developing a sustainable growth, which enables the individual to continue his/her living in the local community.

Employment and sustainable livelihoods emphasise the role of employment and its possible contribution to sustaining a living for the local populations. An increasing number of donor agencies have included this concept into their policies, and are aiming to operationalise it. The focus of this effort is very much on creating employment opportunities and income generation activities. Being the biggest recipients of public investment funds, the infrastructure and transport sectors should be seriously scrutinised in terms of their capacity to contribute to these objectives.

### **3.6 Implications**

The obvious result of these shifts in development strategies and investments will be that more capacities are needed at local level to plan, implement and, most importantly, to operate new infrastructure. Employment-intensive strategies should recognise this and respond through adequate initiatives. It is up to all practitioners to show that the new strategies are sound and viable.

Also, as poverty alleviation and employment generation now form important parts of development agencies' programmes, there is greater potential for labour-based contracting. The increasing emphasis on spot improvement techniques will favour the use of small-scale local construction units, whose mobilisation abilities and costs are more competitive than those of bigger companies, and whose capacities will be very appropriate for this kind of work.

## **4 Mainstreaming of employment-intensive works**

### **4.1 Force account and private sector**

Employment-intensive force account approaches to the building and maintenance of rural roads have been implemented since the mid-1970s. Starting with one country (Ghana) in the mid-1980s to more than 18 African countries at present, small-scale indigenous contractor development programmes with a focus on the application of appropriate technology are increasing rapidly. Most of these programmes deal with the road sector.

There are also serious efforts made to work with other rural infrastructure investments like irrigation, building, water supply, soil and water conservation and forestry.

The most recent experience of these programmes has been described in a new ILO guide entitled "Employment-Intensive Infrastructure Programmes: Capacity Building for Contracting in the Construction Sector". The guide covers operational issues of contracting development programmes.

#### **4.2 Are employment-intensive programmes stagnating?**

Labour-based technology development programmes are often accused for not being able to grow beyond the pilot or demonstration project phases. Although in Africa countries like Botswana, Kenya and Tanzania have applied the technology in the road sector on a countrywide scale, the labour-based approach has not yet become the first choice for road construction and maintenance in these countries. This applies even to some donor-supported programmes although - in some cases - the same donors were advocating the policies of these programmes. For example, in Ghana where a major investment has been made by the World Bank in developing a substantial number of labour-based contractors, the Bank procedures made it difficult to subsequently make a major share of new investments available for these contractors. It is therefore generally perceived that programmes are not growing at the pace they deserve.

It is a fact that, in most developing countries with wage levels equal to or lower than \$4 per day (the majority), labour-based technology in many cases, and for certain types of work, has proved to be the most cost effective way of providing rural roads. The quality of the work is comparable or better than equipment-based outputs. Also, irrigation programmes carried out in close co-operation with the communities, have provided affordable infrastructure and long term income generation for the farmers. Both the construction phase and the subsequent maintenance period provide very valuable employment opportunities and income generation for the local population, men and women who get a salary and gain skills, important factors contributing to the reduction of poverty. So what is going wrong?

ILO has been advocating the technology with great support from a number of partners over the past two decades. The biases, which prevent this growth, are well known, and approaches have been developed to overcome the constraints. The fact that mainstreaming remains difficult does not prove that these approaches are wrong. It may be that a more aggressive, large-scale approach is needed, and/or that the elements working against the growth of the technology are increasing. The following sections deal with some of the constraints that have been experienced with employment-intensive programmes.

#### **4.3 Contract management and capacities**

To date, a great deal of attention has been paid to the training of contractors, and many initiatives have been taken related to the creation of an enabling environment for small contracting. However, without major re-organisations, it has proved difficult to transform the road agencies to efficient contract management units. A number of country programmes now show that the limited contract management capacities of contracting agencies are a major constraint to the growth of labour-based programmes. This is true both for the major road agencies and for the local authorities that are the main client organisations contracting road works.

The decentralisation policies presently being implemented in many countries have been referred to earlier. Whereas this provides real opportunities, it also poses challenges to employment-intensive programmes. Decentralised management fulfils one of the requirements for the operation of contractors at local level, i.e. that contracts may be entered into and supervision and payments made locally. On the other side it requires the staff to undertake such works. Most client organisations still do not possess such capacities and the development of appropriate levels of construction management capacities within the organisations has proved difficult.

The difficulties with construction management can be eased by an increased use of local consultants. Several labour-based development programmes have recently made a move to get local consultants involved, for supervision, in the delivery of training and capacity building services. However, the appropriate type of consultant is not readily available, at least in rural areas, and necessitates a development programme to be put in place.

Appropriate consultants for local support will need engineering, supervisory and administrative skills, as well as a willingness to be based in rural areas. On the one hand, it will be necessary that the mobilisation costs of such consultants are affordable for the emerging client organisations. In other words, they need to be cheap. On the other hand, the need for quality assessments in order to prepare for spot improvement calls for good skills in order to provide the level of service demanded by the clients. This, in an environment where such skills are rare, tends to increase the costs significantly. Until an adequate capacity is developed, this must be recognised and accepted.

Apart from those factors related to capacity and inappropriate administrative and procurement systems and procedures, there are also attitudinal problems (“labour-based produces inferior quality, the cost of the work and delivery period will not be acceptable, too many small contracts cause too much work, etc.”). A less visible but very real constraint concerns the level of corruption which works against the choice of small-scale labour-based contractors, because small local contracts do not lend themselves easily to providing the necessary incentives for the client organisations. In a number of cases, the difference in unit costs between labour- and equipment-based construction cannot be justified technically and appears to be influenced by the need of the equipment-based contractors to oil the administrative “machinery”.

#### **4.4 Labour-based technology confined to community works?**

Examples from different countries have shown that labour-based techniques can be successfully applied for most maintenance activities on the entire road network. It has also been shown that labour-based technology (with different degrees of supporting equipment) can be a very competitive approach to equipment-based construction for more important works. For example, the project experiences fully justify employment-intensive works on main roads and alike, works that are more demanding than those identified and prioritised by the communities. The labour-based approach is fully justified from an engineering and economical point of view on a larger part of our networks.

However, currently many partners are confining the technology to minor rural roads and community works only. This is illustrated by the Sub-Saharan Africa Transport Policy Programme (SSATP), of which, for instance, the Rural Travel and Transport Programme has been charged with the promotion of labour-based technology but where the technology is not on the agenda for the Road Management Initiative (RMI). Similarly, several national road agencies are leaving labour-based works approaches to local authorities, failing to understand and use the potential of the technology. Others are, wrongly so,

confining labour-based technology to maintenance works only, leaving construction works to be implemented by large-scale contractors.

This is an important constraint to the large-scale application of labour-based technology taking away a major potential market from the small-scale labour-based contractors.

#### **4.5 Diversification and growth**

The focus of contractor development programmes to date has been on the road sector. Obviously, the potential market in this sector is significant, providing for work opportunities for the contractors in the future. However, the dependency on (largely) one employer is risky and diversification is essential. The current trend – which must be capitalised on – is that a market for labour-based work is emerging in other sectors, both in rural and urban environments. The key issue here is sustainability, not only of the small-scale labour-based contractor, but also rather of the employment-intensive approach itself.

#### **4.6 Appropriate Engineering Standards**

It is generally accepted that the current standards applied in rural road programmes are not the most appropriate. The standards applied often do not relate to the need to provide access to as many people as possible and the need to provide transport services for the people in question. Even if one uses the accepted criteria of road deterioration and life cycle costs, in many cases the construction standards used are of too high a standard.

The current rural road programmes and the shifting emphasis towards investments in community access including other infrastructure like tracks and trails, call for an improved knowledge about the relationships between construction standards and deterioration, and subsequently the lifecycle costs. This will enable the development of guidelines on appropriate construction standards for low volume roads and tracks. The research programme presently being developed by the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) and SweRoad consultants in a partnership with ASIST, is aiming at addressing this issue and the drawing up of guidelines justifying investments and more appropriate interventions in respect of lower level types of infrastructure.

### **5 Urban Infrastructure**

#### **5.1 Rural Experience and Urban Focus**

Many of the principles applied to rural road programmes and in particular rural infrastructure works are equally valid for activities in urban infrastructure in low income areas (mainly unplanned or informal settlements). City or town councils have typically neglected these settlements in the past as they were expected to disappear over time when cities grew to accommodate more migrants. As this did not happen, many agencies are now interested in supporting the development in such areas in order to reduce the access problems and health and environmental risks.

The main feature of urban works programmes is that they do not focus on the labour-based approach only, but entail extensive community management efforts which necessitate the development of partnership arrangements between authorities and communities (and their representatives). This development may in some cases include the strengthening of already established relationships, but often involves the establishment of new processes or entire partnerships. The formalisation of such partnerships is crucial for the success of any

development involving the community and their resources in the development of the settlement. Community contracting is an important tool in formalising such a partnership.

## **5.2 Community Contracting**

Previously community contracting was considered to be a tool of enabling the engagement of people from the community in the implementation of the works, mostly in terms of providing paid or unpaid labour. Community contracting was also used to contract out infrastructure work in difficult and sometimes hazardous environments. The ILO and its partners now develop community contracting as a process to involve the stakeholders from the planning phase of a project up to the maintenance.

Experience from Asia has shown that, if the political and economic environment is favourable, small contractors can develop out of these community contracts. This is confirmed by the ILO experience from the rural road sector. Similar to the road sector, urban unplanned settlements can provide substantial work in both construction and maintenance for small-scale contractors.

Useful experience has been gained with urban works in a number of African countries. This involves both unpaid labour, like in the self-help operations and food for work activities in Lusaka, and paid labour (Nairobi, Dar es Salaam and Kampala). As for rural works, it is important to distinguish between public works and community works when it comes to the use of self-help activities. In an urban setting, this is even more difficult than in the rural setting. The selected approach will have a serious impact on people's possible contribution during the construction period, but particularly on the subsequent operation and maintenance of the infrastructure. The community contracting methodology aims at clarifying such roles, creating partnerships, and avoiding non-sustainable situations.

Another aspect of community contracting is that it clarifies with all partners concerned the needs of a technically and economically sound development of the area. Experiences with many a socially motivated programme have shown that often the technical aspects have not been taken seriously enough, and insurmountable operational and maintenance problems have emerged following the low-key investments. Whereas the investment must be affordable for the partners, the construction must follow the principles of good quality and cost effectiveness. This implies that supporting agencies have an obligation to educate the partners about these technical and economic principles throughout the development process, while at the same time leaving the planning and implementation aspects in the hands of the community.

## **5.3 Integrated Approach and Activities**

For urban works activities, it is particularly important to be aware of the importance of integrating project (infrastructure) activities with other activities and sectors. This includes community organisation and contracting, but also related activities such as solid waste management and micro enterprise development.

The importance of solid waste management comes from the fact that any investment in storm-water drainage or access through roads, tracks and paths is not going to be sustainable unless the maintenance problem is solved. In many urban areas, dealing with solid waste clogging up the drains may be too much to bear for any organisation, whether a community or a public organisation. Experience has shown that tackling the solid waste issue is a must for any urban upgrading programme. The linkage of capacity building for urban infrastructure to the formation of small enterprises dealing with solid waste

management and recycling, is thus an area of great concern for such programmes. This focus on the environment may also result in direct benefits for the client which are likely to be substantially greater than the initial investment costs.

#### **5.4 The Work of ASIST**

The current focus of ASIST's work in the urban sector is to develop adequate and much needed information and training material for agencies wishing to use these approaches. Training material is mainly required for technical staff of urban councils, NGOs and the private sector. Awareness raising will be essential to change mentalities, and to introduce project approaches with urban communities wishing an upgrading and a regularisation of their environment.

### **6 Some Crosscutting Issues**

#### **6.1 Policy development**

Policy work forms an important part of all components of employment-intensive programmes. Much of the development work (at national levels but also at provincial and district levels) still fails largely due to the lack of appropriate national policies. Moreover, programmes are not growing due to the lack of these policies. Other development programmes may counteract the strategies pursued if national policies are not developed and adhered to. Adequate policy development is therefore a prerequisite for the mainstreaming of sound employment-intensive development programmes.

Appropriate decentralisation policies are a must for any attempt to do any structured accessibility work. In addition, complementary development of rural transport or accessibility policies is needed to allow the formulation of common targets for access interventions and to develop a framework within which planning methodologies such as IRAP will work efficiently.

The operational environment needed for contracting development programmes is discussed in detail in the new ILO Guide for capacity building in the construction sector. The same Guide also deals with different policy issues, like investment policies and stable financing, procurement policies and the role of the national construction industry, employment creation policies, labour policies, training policies, decentralisation (of agencies) policies, etc. Much experience has been gained in this area, particularly related to roads and rural infrastructure programmes. Employment-intensive urban infrastructure works will encounter many of the same issues, but also different policy aspects and subjects specifically related to the urban environment.

#### **6.2 Observatories of employment, or labour-based forums**

Policy development work has been at the heart of ILO's work in this field. Important issues here are the necessary information gathering and the development of local (national) knowledge and capacities to work on these policies.

National instruments are required for this purpose. These take different forms, but basically aim at filling the same role. Observatories of employment, EIP policy units or labour-based policy promotion units have been established in some countries (in the francophone part of Africa, these are called "Cellules HIMO", labour-intensive units). These units are mostly established within the planning and finance ministries in order to have an impact on policy development work. In other countries, labour-based forums have

been established within technical ministries aiming to support policy and technology development work within the ministry concerned. Other forums work on the promotion of employment-intensive strategies both within their home ministry, but also within other ministries and the private sector.

These units are crucial for the support to policy development and expansion of employment-intensive programmes. They are necessary if the full potential for the use of labour-based technology is to be realised.

### **6.3 Labour Issues**

Labour-based technology is very much dependent on the availability and performance of the workers.

In the past, although labour issues have been a concern in some countries, no major problems were encountered. Agencies, mainly working on programmes using force account operations, have been working within Government regulations and ready to deal with issues that have come up. However, with the move to labour-based contracting, the need to guide Government Agencies, employers, and labour and unions alike, has been accentuated. Private sector involvement and the competitive environment in which contractors work, make possible labour abuses more likely. This should be avoided. In addition, the ILO firmly believes that an improvement in the labour practices and working conditions will have a positive impact on worker motivation, productivity rates and hence the long-term viability of labour-based operations.

It is in this context that a Guide on Labour Policies and Practices was prepared and published. This Guide is expected to contribute to the development of appropriate policies for the growth of employment-intensive programmes beyond present levels. It should also contribute to a process where labour laws and regulations are being adjusted to allow for and promote the efficient use of labour-based technology. This calls for new initiatives both related to awareness creation and policy development.

### **6.4 University Network**

It has long been recognised that the lack of awareness and understanding among policy makers, managers and engineers creates strong biases against labour-based technology. Leaders have not been confronted with and trained in employment-intensive technologies during their higher education. This lack of recognition among the learning institutions has slowed down the process of making the labour-based technology acceptable at policy and operational levels.

One way of addressing this problem is to support universities and technical colleges to introduce technology choice and management of labour-based programmes into their course materials. This is an efficient way of creating awareness and preparing people for choices to be made when they move into senior decision-making positions later. This is a long-term effort expected to positively affect the acceptance and large-scale application of labour-based technologies.

University Networks have now been formed in Africa and Asia. The aim of their work is to share information and experiences with the modification of the curricula, and on research work at the different member institutions. The ILO, in partnership with the Institute for Hydraulic and Environmental Engineering (IHE), has provided material for undergraduate and postgraduate courses in civil engineering faculties and departments.



IHE also runs annual orientation courses, meant for decision-makers and planners at national institutions, development agencies and alike.

Parallel work is underway with the regional and urban planning departments at a number of universities. The focus here is to share information on the development of rural accessibility policies, programmes and tools, and to involve the universities in such development work undertaken in the different countries.